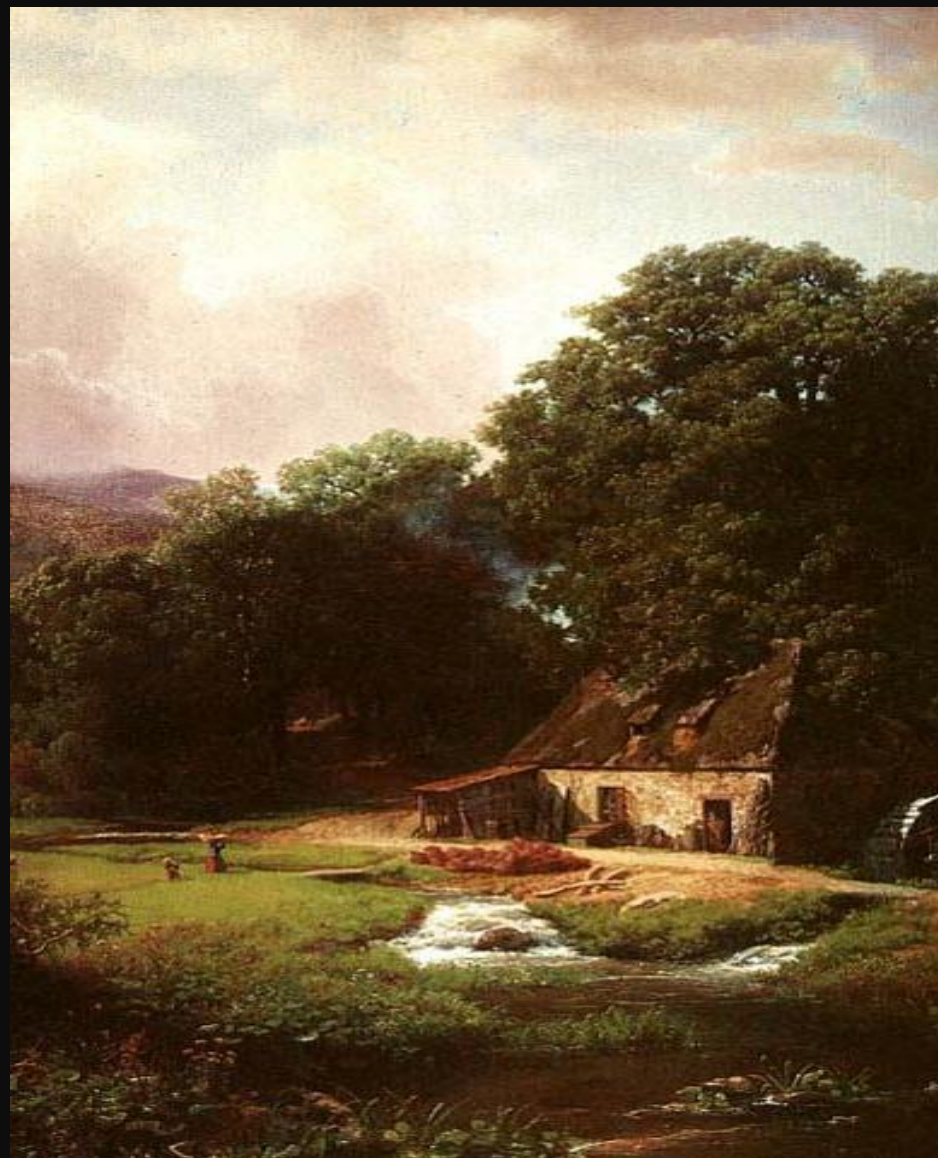
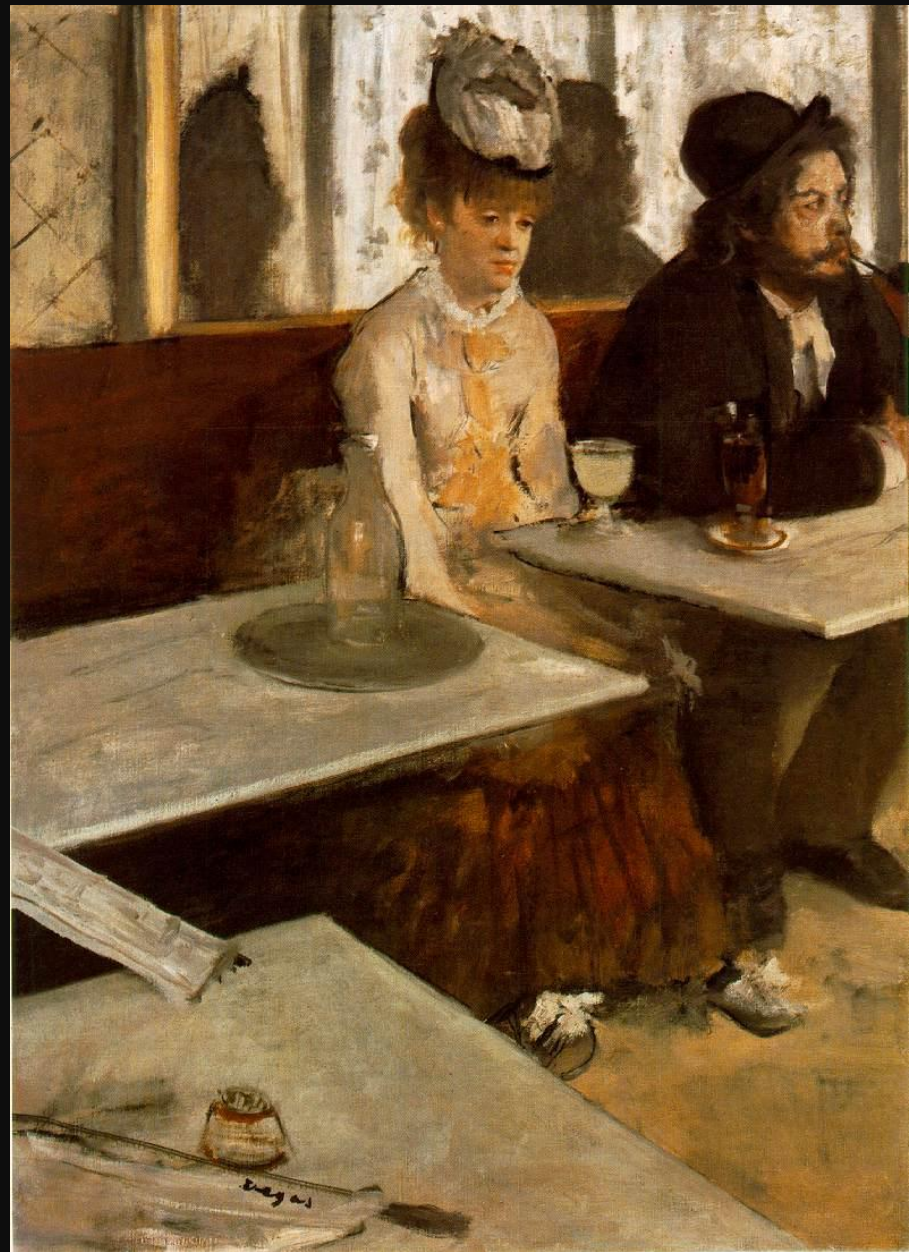


American Realism, Regionalism, and Naturalism

Realism (noun): the art of depicting nature as it is seen by toads. The charm suffusing a landscape painted by a mole, or a story written by a measuring-worm.

— Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary* (1911)







What brought about Realism?

- A reaction against **Romanticism**
 - rejected heroic, adventurous, or unfamiliar subjects
- The **emerging middle class** brings increasing rates of **literacy** as well as the rise of **popular literature** – elitist literary movements (e.g. Romanticism) lessen with pressure for realistic portrayals of American population
- The harsh reality of the **Civil War** and **frontier life** shattered the nation's idealism
- The **urbanization** and **industrialization** of America
- Upheaval and **social change** in the latter half of the 19th century

Romanticism versus Realism

Romanticism

- Aspired to the ideal
- Thought to be more genteel since it did not show the vulgar details of life

Realism

- Thought to be more **democratic**
- Critics stressed its potential for **vulgarity** and its emphasis on the commonplace
- Potential “**poison**” for the pure of mind

Romanticism versus Realism

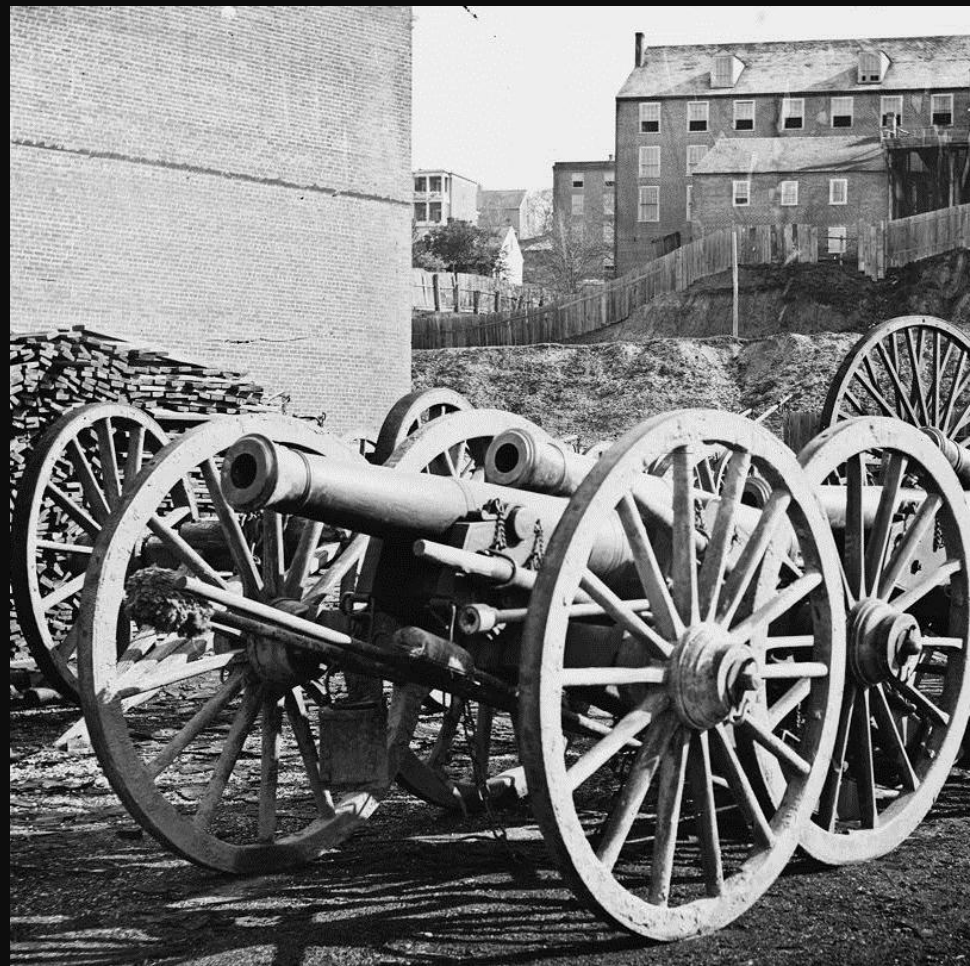
- Renders reality in less volume and detail.
- Prefers action to character.
- Reality does not impinge as frequently on the action of the piece as in a novel.
- Characters not as complexly related to each other or to their society.
- Human relationships tend to be narrowly or obsessively involved rather than displaying a range of human relationships.
- Renders reality closely and in comprehensive detail.
- **Character** is more important than action and plot; Complex ethical choices are often the subject.
- Characters appear in their real **complexity** of temperament and motive; they are in a complex relationship or conflict with nature, with each other, with their social class, with their own past.
- Events will usually be **plausible**. Realistic novels avoid the sensational, dramatic elements of naturalistic novels and romances.

Romanticism versus Realism

- Origins and class of characters sometimes irrelevant, sometimes a mystery.
- Plot is highly colored, featuring astonishing events that have symbolic or allegorical import.
- Tends toward mythic, allegorical, or symbolic forms; Heightened diction.
- **Class** is important; the realist novel has traditionally served the interests and aspirations of an insurgent middle class.
- **Diction** is natural vernacular, not heightened or poetic; Tone may be comic, satiric, or matter-of-fact.
- **Objectivity** becomes increasingly important – overt authorial comments or intrusions lessen as the century progresses

The Civil War

- The industrialized North defeated the agrarian South, and the United States headed toward capitalism.
- The war taught men that life, man and God were not so **good** or **pure**.
- The war marked a change in the quality of American life, a deterioration of American moral values.





1880s Urbanization

- Commerce took the lead in the national economy with the movement from free commerce to **monopolization**
- The spirit of **self-reliance** became perverted into a **lust for money and power**.
- Increasing industrialization produced **extremes of wealth and poverty**.
- Wealth and power were more and more concentrated in the hands of the few "captains of industry".
- In the meantime, millions of people were **struggling for survival**.



Results of Industrialism

- Cities became manufacturing centers and more people moved from rural areas into the cities to find jobs;
- A **large urban middle class** appeared, involved in manufacturing, wholesale and retail sales, banking, the legal and other professions, and the stock market.
- Advances in the technology of printing allowed cheaper production and **mass marketing of books and magazines**
- Both of which provided fiction that appealed to the interests of **middle-class readers**.

Influence of the Middle Class

- The **spread of education**, through the proliferation of public and private schools in the industrialized western world;
- The cumulative effect of these conditions was the formation of a **literate middle class** who saw its members as social and political protagonists;
- They wanted a literature that reflected its social structure, manners, and ethical values.

Closing of the American Frontier

- Now that the frontier was about to close and the safety valve was ceasing to operate. The American people lost their dream and imagination.



The Gilded Age

Beneath the glittering surface of prosperity there lay suffering and unhappiness. What had been expected to be a Golden Age turned out to be a Gilded one.



What is Realism?

- A faithful representation of reality in literature
- Emphasis on development of believable characters.
- Written in natural vernacular, or dialect.
- Prominent from 1860-1890.

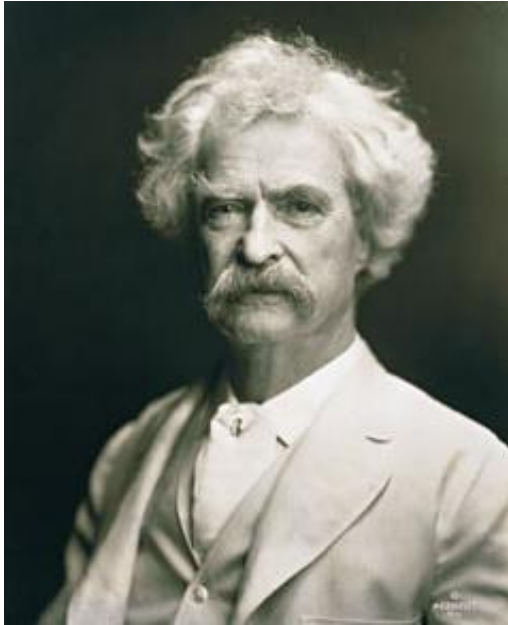
Characteristics of Realism

- truthful description of life
- **typical** character under **typical** circumstance
- **objective** rather than idealized
- close observation and investigation of life
- concerned with **social** and **psychological** problems
- **open-ended endings**: leaves room for readers to think for themselves.

Characteristics of Realism

- Protagonists are typical members of the middle class and reflect the attitudes and values as well as the customs and manners of this class.
(some characters may belong to other classes).
- Unlike romantic heroes and villains, the characters are neither extremely good nor extremely bad, but have a mixture of both qualities.

Realist Writers



Mark Twain



**William Dean
Howells**



Henry James



**Edgar Lee
Masters**

Howells on Realism



“Realism is nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material”

— William Dean Howells,
November 1889

The Rise of Regionalism



What is Regionalism?

- Often called “local color.”
- Focuses on characters, dialect, customs, topography, and other features specific to a certain region (eg. the South)
- Coincided with Realism and sharing many of the same traits.
- Prominent from 1865-1895.

Regionalist Writers

- Kate Chopin—South
- Mary E. Wilkins-Freeman—New England
- Mark Twain—West
- Willa Cather—Midwest



Why did Regionalism develop?

- Dual influence of Romanticism and Realism
- The Civil War and the building of a national identity
- An outgrowth of realism with more focus on a particular setting and its influence over characters

What is Naturalism?

- Applied scientific principles of objectivity and detachment to the study of human beings.
- Influenced by Darwinism (natural selection) and psychology (Freud)
- Posited that men were governed by heredity and environment.
- Often depict man in conflict with nature, society, or himself.
- Prominent from 1880-1920(ish)

What is Naturalism?

A man said to the universe:

"Sir, I exist!"

"However," replied the universe,

"The fact has not created in me

A sense of obligation."

--Stephen Crane (1894, 1899)

Why did Naturalism develop?

- The swell of immigrants in the latter half of the 19th century, which led to a larger lower class and increased poverty in the cities
- The prominence of psychology and the theories of Sigmund Freud
- Pessimism in the wake of the Civil War and Reconstruction
- Publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species*

Characteristics of Naturalism

- Themes: survival, determinism, and taboo issues.
- Conflict: man versus nature, man versus self
- Characters struggle against pressures that threaten to release the "brute within."
- Characters are often lower class in urban settings
- Nature is an indifferent or antagonistic force acting on the lives of human beings.
- Forces of heredity and environment as they affect and afflict--individual lives.

Points to Remember...

- Realism, Regionalism, and Naturalism are intertwined and connected.
- Their influence has dominated most literature created since 1920, though the movement itself is dated to roughly that point.
- They are truly American modes of writing.

Naturalist Writers

- Stephen Crane
- Ambrose Bierce
- Jack London
- Edwin Arlington Robinson
- Katherine Anne Porter
- Charlotte Perkins Gilman
- Edith Wharton

